

Seven of the best browsable bookshops in the UK

Craft workshops, kids' activities and even ice-cream parlours – these independent book stores are doing things differently



Lion Street, Hay-On-Wye ALAMY

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Wednesday January 10 2024, 12.02am, The Sunday Times

Bookshops aren't only about books and laid-back browsing — and recent data from The Booksellers Association suggests [they're having a renaissance](#). Our pick features ice-cream parlours, craft barns and events held by some of Britain's best authors. With lesser-known, vintage or hot-off-the-press editions on the shelves, these bookshops mean you're unlikely to walk away empty-handed.

1. Much Ado Books, Alfriston, East Sussex



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This Sussex stalwart is run by the antiquarian book enthusiasts Cate Olsen and Nash Robbins, who love to champion new talent and introduce readers to forgotten classics. As well as a two-floor shop, where the steps are decorated with book spines, there's a barn with craft workshops offering everything from collage sessions to felted slipper workshops — and a shepherd's hut for Prospero's Project, the bookshop's social enterprise. It's the perfect place to shop for presents too. The owner Cate's book wrapping incorporates vintage ribbons along with a fancy tea bag to use while reading (muchadobooks.com). Stay down the road at the Star Inn, a charming 15th-century pub with a residents' library that has a secret behind-the-bookshelf door.

Details B&B doubles from £220 (thepolizzicollection.com)

2. Barter Books, Alnwick, Northumberland



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Barter Books is one of Britain's largest second-hand book stores and it would be easy to spend a day riffling through its collection of 350,000 pre-loved beauties or tucking in at the on-site ice-cream parlour. It's housed in Alnwick's former Victorian railway station and you'll see nods of that heritage everywhere — most charming are the miniature trains which chug on tracks that run above the bookshelves. There's also a barter system, so you can bring your old books for a chance to trade them in for tokens to spend in store, plus a giant authors' mural featuring Charlotte Brontë and Edward Lear (barterbooks.co.uk). Make a weekend of it with a stay at the Tempus, which has *Alice in Wonderland*-inspired interiors and a fun jungle-themed cocktail bar.

Details B&B doubles from £100 (charltonhall.co.uk)

3. Richard Booth's Bookshop, Hay-on-Wye, Powys



DAVID RYLE/VISIT WALES

The world's first book town is packed with bookshops — 14 at last count — found in the castle, the fire station and even an old cinema. Richard Booth's on Lion Street is the OG of them all, with its former, eponymous owner planting the seeds for the world-famous

Hay Festival. Behind a crimson and white-tiled façade, the three-floor shop has mahogany flooring, shelves lined with new and second-hand books, red-and-white striped chairs to lounge in underneath a palm tree, and an indie cinema (boothbooks.co.uk).

Hunker down later at Baskerville House, a former coaching inn that Arthur Conan Doyle is said to have frequented.

Details B&B doubles from £112 (baskerville-house.com)

4. Hatchards, Piccadilly, London



This five-floor bookshop, established in 1797, is the oldest in the capital and stands out with its deep green Georgian façade, books displayed behind curved bay windows and flowing calligraphy script signage. It also has a plum location on Piccadilly, holds two royal warrants and draws visiting authors from Charles Cumming to Sofia Coppola like bees to a honeypot — which means heaps of signed copies of your favourite stories. Thanks to being mentioned in *Mrs Dalloway*, it's a favourite among Virginia Woolf fans, and more recently the shop's captured the imagination of TikTok trend BookTok with Gen Z-ers stopping in to re-enact a scene from the film adaptation of Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* (hatchards.co.uk). Stay a short walk away at Amano Covent Garden and you can take to the gilded bathtubs with — what else? — a good book.

Details B&B doubles from £185 (amanogroup.de)

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5. The Mainstreet Trading Company, St Boswells, Scottish Borders



PHIL WILKINSON/ALAMY

The husband-and-wife team Rosamund and Bill de la Hey have transformed this former auction house in the village of St Boswells into a haven for book lovers. As well as hosting events with star writers — former guests have included Michael Morpurgo and Margaret Atwood — it has a deli and home shop in a barn, and a magical café. Here younger readers can discover the Book Burrows: two cupboards converted into listening dens inspired by Beatrix Potter and Roald Dahl where audiobooks play. The café serves a changing menu of dishes from the “Cookbook of the Moment” — this week it’s roast cauliflower and chickpea soup from Alice Hart’s *Repertoire* (mainstreetbooks.co.uk).

Most of the visiting authors — and readers — choose to curl up at the charming five-bedroom Whitehouse Country House.

Details B&B doubles from £190 (whitehousecountryhouse.com)

6. Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights, Bath, Somerset



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Mr B's is a riot of creativity: there's a clawfoot bathtub packed with bestsellers, brightly coloured books displayed next to vintage typewriters and a kids' area where jungle animals drawn by Alex Lucas festoon the walls. Guests can book ahead for the "reading spa" which involves a one-to-one chat over coffee and cake with one of the team who'll recommend a stack of books to take away (£105, including a £60 voucher to spend in-store). Sign up to a two-month book subscription for £95 and you'll be sent six new reads, chosen by a bibliotherapist, in the post (mrbsemporium.com). With its cosy, pastel-hued rooms and huge courtyard (lovely in summer), the Yard is a great place to flick through your favourites.

Details B&B doubles from £150 (theyardinbath.co.uk)

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7. Bookbugs & Dragon Tales, Norwich, Norfolk



The idea for this yellow and blue-gable roofed bookshop in Timberhill came from a pub chat between Leanne and Dan Fridd who wanted to create a bookshop to suit all ages. Now their concept is a reality, where young readers can enjoy bounce-and-rhyme toddler sessions, an arts and crafts space and walls covered in dragon illustrations. And older book lovers can make the most of the in-store café. The vibe is so relaxed you're allowed to sip hot chocolate while browsing the latest hardbacks (bookbugsanddragontales.com).

Stay at the Assembly House, which regularly hosts literary events and is well known for its afternoon teas.

Details B&B doubles from £170 (assemblyhousenorwich.co.uk)

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